

PART 7: SHURA - GIVING AND TAKING OPINIONS



يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مَنْ يَرْتَدَّ مِنْكُمْ عَنْ دِينِهِ فَسَوْفَ يَأْتِي اللَّهَ بِقَوْمٍ يُحِبُّهُمْ وَيُحِبُّونَهُ أَذِلَّةٌ عَلَى الْمُؤْمِنِينَ أَعِزَّةٌ عَلَى الْكَافِرِينَ
يُجَاهِدُونَ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَلَا يَخَافُونَ لَوْمَةَ لَائِمٍ ۚ ذَٰلِكُمْ فَضْلُ اللَّهِ يُؤْتِيهِ مَنْ يَشَاءُ ۚ وَاللَّهُ وَاسِعٌ عَلِيمٌ

O you who believe! Whoever from among you turns back from his religion (Islam), Allah will bring forth [in place of them] a people He will love and who will love Him, [who are] humble toward the believers, mightily proud towards the disbelievers, striving in the way of Allah; and they do not fear the blame of (any) blamer. That is the Grace of Allah (that) He brings to whomever He decides; and Allah is Ever-Embracing, Ever-Knowing. (Quran 5:54)

فَمَا أُوتِيتُمْ مِنْ شَيْءٍ فَمَتَّاعُ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا ۚ وَمَا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ خَيْرٌ وَأَتَيْنَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَلَىٰ رَبِّهِمْ يَتَوَكَّلُونَ

وَالَّذِينَ يَجْتَنِبُونَ كِبَآئِرَ الْإِثْمِ وَالْفَوَاحِشَ وَإِذَا مَا غَضِبُوا هُمْ يَغْفِرُونَ

وَالَّذِينَ اسْتَجَابُوا لِرَبِّهِمْ وَأَقَامُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَأَمْرُهُمْ شُورَىٰ بَيْنَهُمْ وَمِمَّا رَزَقْنَاهُمْ يُنْفِقُونَ

AND [remember that] whatever you are given [now] is but for the [passing] enjoyment of life in this world - whereas that which is with God is far better and more enduring. [It shall be given] to all who attain to faith and in their Sustainer place their trust.

And those who avoid the major sins and immoralities, and when they are angry, they forgive.

And those who have responded to their lord and established prayer and whose affair is [determined by] consultation among themselves, and from what We have provided them, they spend. (Quran 42:36-38)

وَشَاوِرْهُمْ فِي الْأَمْرِ فَإِذَا عَزَمْتَ فَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَى اللَّهِ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُتَوَكِّلِينَ

And consult with them in (conducting) matters. Once you make a decision, put your trust in Allah. Surely Allah loves those who trust in Him. (Quran 3:159)

INTRODUCTION TO THE SECTION

This section deals with voicing your concern or opinion in an organization in a manner that is coherent with our Islamic values and productive for the work that we are engaged in. What are the guidelines that we have to follow when we give

our opinion? What are the ethics of giving our opinion? This section of our book will deal with these aspects.

The first of the verses I would like to share with you in relation to this are from Sura Maida, 'Those who have iman if anyone goes back on their religion Allah will replace them and Allah will bring another nation He will love them and they will love him. They will be extremely humble to the believers and severe against the disbelievers.' (Quran 42:54)

BEING HUMBLE IN GIVING SUGGESTIONS

Before we give our opinion, we must know what it means to be humble in our interaction with other believers. The Arabic word for humility comes from the word 'zulala'. Zulala is something that you walk over, for example, a rug. So are we being told that we have to let other believers walk over us? This is basically to guide us that we have to be extremely humble in our interactions with other believers. At the same time, we should be extremely tough with our enemy (disbelievers in this verse means 'enemies'). Our belief should be so firm that nothing should be able to shake it. Our enemies should find us very very heavily rooted in our belief; none of their efforts to sway us away from our deen should be able to deviate us.

DON'T BE SHY IN VOICING YOUR OPINION:

Before we progress our discussion further, it is very important to understand the context of this surah. Victory of Islam has just come through. Makkah has been conquered. It is now directed that the Muslims have to be tough with the Kafireen as they were trying to destabilize Islam and the state of Madinah. That was their attitude.

Allah then adds further in relation to the topic of giving your opinion: 'They struggle for the sake of Allah and they don't fear the blame of anyone who casts blame.'

Please read carefully. It says, 'They don't fear the blame of anyone who blames them.' That is the criticism of anyone who criticizes them when they voice their opinion. They don't look around and say, 'What are people going to say if I say this?'; or 'It is in my conscious. I can't sit on it.. I feel like it is important to give this thought and I should say something but everybody around me is going to think I am weirdo or I am a trouble maker or I'm causing problems, so I should just stay quiet.' No! You shouldn't just stay quiet.

DO NOT GIVE IN TO PEER-PRESSURE

This peer pressure thing is against the ethics in an Islamic organization. This is because organizations tend to develop momentum once they start going in a direction and they go full steam ahead. At that time you and your good conscious

realize that there is something wrong with this direction, but you don't voice your opinion because everybody is too excited about continuing to go. Maybe it's not the best direction but the train's already left the station, so to say.

You should and you have to voice your concern no matter what other people say. You have to be courageous about voicing your sincere opinions. Having said that, you don't have to be a punk about it either.

After understanding the importance of giving opinions, let us now discuss the manners of doing it.

BEING RESPECTFUL AND KIND IN GIVING OPINION

You don't have to make trouble at a meeting by saying things like, 'What we are doing is hypocrisy' or 'we are a complete failure' and so on. There are respectful ways of voicing your opinion! You can be polite and decent and say things like, "I am not too comfortable with this...", 'I don't want to be offensive but how can we justify this...' or 'This doesn't seem right to me...' The same person who is very decent in his office is sometime not that decent in the Islamic sittings. That shouldn't be the case. This work is more central to our purpose of life and deserves more respect.

There is no better key to unlock the heart than kindness in giving suggestion and advice. Gentleness in exhortation and softness in speech are the fundamental traits of true believers,

as the Prophet ﷺ said, "Kindness is not to be found in anything but that it adds to its beauty, and it is not withdrawn from anything but it makes it defective." [Muslim]

The other thing is that voicing your opinion is not just about something that is wrong, but it can also be a suggestion for improvement. If you have a suggestion for betterment or a strategic suggestion, do voice it.

INTENTIONS MATTER!

You should never be afraid of giving these kinds of suggestions; but keep in mind that it is something that could either save you or destroy you. If our intention is not right and we are seeking personal, materialistic or ego-related benefits or satisfaction for ourselves, or if our objective is dunya, then it can destroy us.

We have to remember that giving a sincere suggestion for the sake of Allah is an act of worship. Giving a suggestion is just like giving sadaqah or charity. Sadaqah should only be for pleasing Allah swt. We cannot have partners in for whom we are doing it. Likewise, giving sincere advice should only be for Allah. If you expect returns in dunya (this world) from this sadaqah, then why do you expect from Allah to count this for you in the aakhirah. If you expect that your opinion should be taken and acted upon, then in that case you did not give that

opinion for the sake of Allah. You gave it for the sake of getting it followed. You gave that opinion for yourself!

WHAT IF YOUR SUGGESTION IS NOT FOLLOWED

As stated above, giving your opinion is an act of worship. A good way of understanding the method of giving your opinion is through salat (prayers). In the salaah, for example, let's say that the imam confused the number of rakahs he offered in Zuhr prayer. Shaytan got to him and he got up for the 5th rakah. You're standing behind. What do you do? You give your opinion. How do you give your opinion? You say, 'Subhan Allah'. But let's suppose the imam still stands up and makes the full fifth rakat. What do you do then? You don't do what you think is right and cut off after the fourth rakah; you keep quiet and follow along. Why? Because the discipline of the group is more important than you being right individually. Your responsibility was completed the moment you voiced your concern. If you courageously voiced your concern then the onus for things going wrong are not on your shoulders; it's on the leadership. You did your part.

We should make the following dua every time we give our opinion, 'Ya Allah, I gave given this opinion for your sake. Please accept it as an act of worship for you.'

WHAT IF YOUR OPINION IS ACCEPTED AND TAKEN

If we truly have our intentions right then instead of being offended, we should be terribly afraid if our opinion is taken. Because, if our opinion is taken, then the entire responsibility falls on us. It went from the leadership's opinion to my opinion. If something goes wrong, I will be asked about it because that was my suggestion. So know that it is very important to give your suggestions, however when you do that, carefully think it through and then give a sincere suggestion. Ask Allah for guidance when you make a suggestion and do not be offended when it is not taken. It's not the end of the world. It's not like kufr and imaan. Do not fall into that sort of a thinking when you rate your opinion so high that you tend to believe that your opinion was 'iman' and everything else was 'kufr'. Absolute authority belongs only to Allah. Not to the khateeb, not to the scholars, and not to yourself, not to organizations, not to anybody, but Allah. So don't be afraid to give your opinion, but don't be too hung up on it either.

A TRAIT OF HYPOCRITES:

Loving their own opinions and being hung up on getting them implemented, irrespective of expected outcomes, is something that hypocrites used to do.

'Do we have any authority?' 'Nobody listens to us; nobody takes what we say seriously'. That's what they said and got

offended when their opinion was not taken at the time of Uhud. So, we should not be like them and should not have that kind of an attitude. That's the first important point regarding giving opinions and suggestions.

PURIFYING OURSELVES FIRST:

The second point that I wish to discuss is from a long passage from Surah Shura as presented at the beginning of this section. Let's discuss it part by part. The passage first explains some prerequisites to shura and then gradually moves on towards the actual process of consultation.

In the beginning of this passage, Allah swt says, 'Whatever you have been given is mataa (provisions) to enjoy in this life but whatever Allah has is better for those who truly believe. And they place their complete trust in Allah.' (Quran 42:36)

The passage begins with Tawakkul, reliance or dependence on Allah. Then moves on to another theme.

'Those who stay away from major sins and all forms of vulgarity... .' (Quran 42:37)

How does this relate to our discussion? If your opinion is going to be worth something then you have to be worth something before Allah. And we, as workers of Islam, have to get away

from major sins³ first of all. We talked about this in the first section of this book which dealt with balancing the individual worship with our volunteering activities. Now we have to make sure that at least we shouldn't be engrossed in major sins.

BEWARE OF AL-FAWAHISH:

One of the major sins that we should be particularly careful about is Al-Fawahish (الْفَوَاحِش) or vulgarity. This means all forms of shamelessness, vulgarity or obscenity. Stop for a minute and ponder upon this. 'Fawahisha' or shamelessness is already a part of Kabair (major sins), but Allah has mentioned it in this Ayah separately as well. He said "kabaair wal fawaahish" (the big sins and vulgarity). Why is it so? It is to highlight importance of protecting our chastity, especially when we are doing an Islamic volunteer work.

So, especially the young guys and young girls, when you are volunteering at the MSA or ICNA convention or at your university or in an event, you have to watch out for vulgarity and protect your chastity. Shaytaan will try its best to destroy you through this. There should be no inappropriate interactions. We do hear comments like, 'we are just sitting in meeting' or 'we are taking Shura.' That's not Shura and we have to refrain from anything that plays against our modesty and 'haya'. So you have to guard yourself extra when you do

³ A list of major sins has been compiled in Appendix A.

Islamic work because it is the easiest way Shaytaan can get you. He will bombard you with such opportunities and ideas.

Some guys grow a beard and think that it's a safeguard against the fitnah on campus but shaytaan may put 'waswasa' to a girl and she'll come up to you and say, 'By the way, I am in your bio class.' That will be the test when you will have to prove your strength by clinging on to what Allah and His messenger ﷺ have brought and refrain from what they have asked us to refrain from. Same thing can happen to our sisters as well who may put a hijab and think that it will deter the opposite gender from crossing boundaries. It sometime may not happen and you will need to show courage to withstand that.

Shaytaan will try to mess with you. He will try to ruin you, and now you will be going to the convention, for who knows, what reason. You are attending the meetings extra early and you are all dressed up and over-perfumed, for God knows what reason. It happens! And this happens to boys as well as girls. So beware of Shaytan's snare.

CONTROLLING ANGER:

And the next point in the verse is, 'they forgive even when they are angry.' (Quran 42:37)

What is the most difficult urge or feeling to control for young people? It's the tendency towards the opposite gender. If you

can control that, then the next big problem is what? Your temper.

Somebody says something you don't like and that let's you tempers flare!

In the passage under discussion, Allah swt immediately mentions that if you can control 'fawahish' then you will not only be able to control your anger but you'll also be able to forgive others. And that's the key to successful Islamic work. You have to work with others who would sometimes raise your blood pressure. It does happen. It doesn't matter whether you're working at a masjid or a school or any other community organization. It doesn't matter what voluntary work you are doing. You will be around people that will get on your nerves and they will crawl under your skin and some will make your blood boil and they will make you want to say something bad. But when that urge comes to you just recite, وَإِذَا مَا غَضِبُوا هُمْ يَغْفِرُونَ 'Whenever they get mad, they forgive.' (42:37)

It does not just finish at getting calmed-down when angry. The words of Allah are, 'THEY FORGIVE.' They move on. They learn to grow a thick skin. If people who are going to work for Islam don't have a thick skin, they'd better grow one and be mentally prepared to be offended a lot. That comes with the territory. This also is true for other areas of life like in families and at the workplace.

ALLAH'S WORK IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN YOUR ANGER

Many people join organizations with good intention and at the start are given congratulations and hugs, but a few months down the lane, they hear something they did not want to hear and they get offended and say, 'I am never going back there again.' You ask, 'Why?' The reply is, 'You don't know what they said to me?'

What that guy said to you was your test of whether you get angry or not. This is because Allah's work is more important than your anger and your pride. If you were doing good work in that organization, you go back keep doing it! I am not saying you let people walk all over you, but you should stand up for yourself. Sometimes, people give sarcastic remarks and say things that burn others from inside. For example, there are husband who when their wives make a good meal say, "Hey, it's a really tasty food today, Were you ok today. Your food otherwise is pathetic". Why can't we simply appreciate others and say, 'It's good, nice food.'

Such disrespectful comments, in the context of Islamic organizations, add up till the person goes crazy. They keep building up till the kettle overflows.

But you, on the receiving end, should learn to take it and grow a thick skin. Learn to laugh it off. Learn to hear obscene and offensive things and just laugh them off and let them go.

That's the way you will be able to continue your work. And those people who test your patience, they are a blessing because Allah teaches you 'sabr' or patience through them. Otherwise you may not even be able to learn what sabr is. Sabr would just be a theory. What is sabr if it is not tested? And sometimes it's tested by those who are close to us and those who work with us.

CONSULTATION

Finally the verse says, 'Those who have responded to their Master [and they did not forget their individual responsibility when doing the collective work], they establish salaah and their decisions are essentially consultation among them.' (42:38)

Allah swt did not say that their matters are based on consultation; the ayah says, 'their matters are consultation'. All their decisions are consultation.

WHAT SHURA IS NOT

Consultation is not an empty suggestion box which says "put your suggestions here" and there is a shredder at the bottom. Or, 'Brother, if you have a concern, say it in the mic.' The brother says, 'I think we should have a youth program!'. 'Jazakallah, Next!'. 'I think we should have a women's programme!'. 'Jazakallah, Next!'. Jazakallah, Jazakallah, Jazakallah. Move on! That's not shura brothers. Shura isn't just

to let people blow their hot air and say 'Jazakallah' afterwards and do whatever you are going to do. That's not shura. So what shura actually is?

WHAT SHURA IS

Shura is to take sincere opinions seriously into consideration.

You should not have your mind made before you go to a shura meeting. If you go there with decisions already made or after making your mind up, then it's not called a shura meeting. If you have your mind made up already, then any opinion that comes to you, is just going to be knocked out of the park for a six. You would just be sitting there to state and defend your opinion. That's not shura.

Shura means that you are open to others' ideas and that you haven't yet made up your mind. In shura, thoughts are exchanged, participants are open to ideas and are willing to listen to each other in the pursuit of making best possible decisions. It may happen that what you had in mind isn't the best solution, and what the others offer maybe better or a combination of the two can work well. So, be open, and as advised earlier, and do not be hung up on your own ideas. You have to go to shura with a shura attitude and that's when shura is shura. That's when it really counts for something.

IF YOU ARE NOT SATISFIED WITH SHURA DECISION:

Now if you do give a suggestion and it's serious (I am not talking about things like colour of the carpet, I'm talking about serious stuff like who should be eligible for sadaqa or who should be the next school principal or something big), and you think there is a serious problem with the decision of the committee then what should you do?

What you are required to do is that you should not discuss it with fellow volunteers. You should discuss it with someone above you. You discuss it with the Ameer and don't discuss it with anybody else. If you do, that's not shura. It's najwa (secret discussions) and we will discuss this in next session of this book. If the ameer does not take it seriously either, you take it to somebody above him. If nothing happens there as well, then you bring it up one final time in front of everybody and say, 'I have brought this suggestion up a number of occasions and this is the last time I'm bringing it up. I will not bring it up again. Here are my concerns...and they haven't been met.'

And if you think it's a life and death issue, then that's your last draw. You say it publicly, 'this is my concern and in good faith I cannot continue to work in this organization, (if this is the case) I will not bring it up again.'

But while doing so, do not forget to check your intentions and identify if ego is involved at any stage.

What was the channel? First you bring it up to the one above, then one above that, then in front of everyone and you are done. Don't email anybody about it. No going back and forth. No discussions after the meeting. It's finished. It is dead.

MANNERS OF LEAVING AN ORGANIZATION UPON DISAGREEMENT:

As you are leaving the organization, if that is unfortunately the case, make dua for the organization. 'May Allah bless this effort. May Allah unite us. May Allah forgive my and your shortcomings.' Leave on a good note. Don't leave like it was a wrestling match. Don't walk away angry. These are your brothers. You want to see them in Jannah. You are all here for the same reason - to please Allah and your leaving of that organization should also be for this purpose – to please Allah. If your reason for leaving is not this but something else, question yourself and question your decisions. Nobody is getting a pay cheque. Everybody here is a volunteer. If there's anger in the meetings, it's because shaytan is there. He's your enemy, not you of each other. Remember Islamic workers are not enemies of each other! Shaytan is your common enemy. Realize that and don't be fooled by him.

WEIGH YOUR WORDS BEFORE YOU SAY THEM

The next part of the verse says, 'Tell my slaves, say the better thing.'

In your mind, before you open your mouth, there should be a multiple choice questionnaire. I'm about to say, 'you are wrong; what you have just said is all rubbish,' or I could say it this way, 'I don't think I agree with that.'" Maybe I should choose the second way. Think through what you are going to say. And if you don't do that, it is guaranteed that Shaytan will cause dissent among you. No doubt about it! So think and rethink not only what you are going to say but how you are going to say it. That's Shura - a healthy Shura.

BEING GENUINE

Be respectable, be courteous but don't respect people just to pander to them. Don't do ingenuine or false praises. Like, 'Jazakallah, you are doing so much for our community but I have a suggestion.' Don't do that if it's not genuine! Don't butter him up first and then tell him how bad he is. If it's not from the heart, don't say it. It's better for you to stay quiet if there is no genuine need to speak.

So these are the basics of taking and giving of opinions in organizations. The next session is about najwa or secret meetings or discussions.